DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 080 905 CG 007 138

AUTHOR Wallston, Barbara
TITLE The Effect of Sex as A Variable in Help Seeking.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Mental Health (DHEW), Bethesda, Md.
PUB DATE Apr 72
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at a Symposium of the American Educational Research Association, 3-7 April 1972, Chicago, Illinois

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Females; *Helping Relationship; Individual Psychology; *Inhibition; *Males; *Role Perception; *Sex Differences; Social Attitudes; Stereotypes; Task Performance

ABSTRACT

This report examines inhibition in help-seeking for male subjects. Using a male and female experimenter, the study examined the following five variables: (1) sex of helper; (2) sex role appropriateness of task; (3) anticipated future audience interaction; (4) sex role ideology of subject; and (5) self esteem of subject. The report concluded that, for high self-esteem males, help-seeking is inhibited in male-oriented tasks. Men appear to be limited by sex stereotyped training, a factor which affects their requests for tutoring, counseling, and other helping services. By deemphasizing sex-appropriate behavior and decreasing the pressure on men to be independent, we can free them to seek help when it is needed. Not only will such freedom allow better utilization of services, but even more importantly it will allow men to grow as individuals. (Author/LAA)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE CO

ED 080905

CG 007 138

The Effect of Sex as a Variable in Help Seeking[1]

Paper Presentation for Sexism: a Research Approach

A Symposium at the AERA 1972 annual meeting Chicago

Barbara Wallston

Most discussions of sexism focus on its effects on women. However, sex role stereotyping has profound effects on men as well. It limits their behavior in many ways--for example, inhibiting expression of emotion. Another possible limitation, the inhibition of beneficial help seeking, was the focus of this experiment.

Social psychologists have only recently begun a systematic study of the factors involved in help seeking. Investigators have hypothesized a number of factors which inhibit help seeking--e.g., psychological indebtedness (Greenberg, 1968) and perceived threat to self-esteem (Tessler & Schwartz, in press). Seeking help involves admitting failure or exposing inadequacy and thus is cause for embarrassment (Sattler, 1965).

It goes without saying that both males and females may be inhibited from seeking help. In fact, the experiment from which this one stems (Tessler & Schwartz) used only female subjects and

[1]This investigation was supported in part by Public Health Service predoctoral fellowship #5-F01-MH-48172-02 to the author and NIMH grant #MH-18762 to Alan E. Gross. Thanks to the following who assisted in a variety of ways in running this experiment: Patti Ambroziak, Carol Bergdoll, Lorraine Broll, Fred Koerner, Malcolm Lindsay, Rick Tessler, Kenneth Wallston, and Janet Zvibleman. In addition, the assistance of Leonard Berkowitz, Alan Gross, Burt Kaplan, Irving Piliavin, Gerald Thielbar, and Kenneth Wallston during various phases of the design and completion of this experiment are gratefully acknowledged.

CG 007 138

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

found less help seeking when failure was attributed to the self rather than externally. Help seeking was also inhibited for high self-esteem subjects when it reflected on aspects which were central rather than peripheral. However, the strong and early independence training which men receive (Hartup, 1963) suggests that men should be even more inhibited especially on so-called male tasks, such as changing a tire. This experiment focused on males in a situation manipulated so that help was clearly needed and readily available.

The idea of a "male" task parallels the concept of a central task introduced by Tessler & Schwartz, since sex role identity is central to identity for most people (Kohlberg, 1966). However, there are people today questioning sex stereotyping, and thus, there are men for whom the concept of sex appropriate activity is less meaningful. A measure of sex role ideology was developed to isolate such males, termed feminists, as opposed to traditional males, and this individual difference variable was used as an independent factor. Since Tessler & Schwartz had found that centrality only inhibited help seeking for high esteem subjects, the individual difference characteristic, self-esteem, was also measured.

In addition, sex of helper was manipulated because it made intuitive sense that it should have an effect on help seeking. Someone else's presence might also inhibit help seeking, since a public situation increases embarrassment. The relation of the person seeking help to the other present should be important in

modifying this inhibiting factor. Thus, an audience was said to be present in all conditions, but some subjects were told that they would meet and talk with the audience while others were told they would not.

Method

Five variables--sex of helper, sex role appropriateness of task (male or female), whether or not future interaction with an audience was expected, sex role ideology of subject (traditional or feminist), and subject's self-esteem (low or high)--were combined in a 2^5 factorial design. Two experimenters were involved, one male and the other female. The male experimenter ran all subjects when there was a male assistant; the female experimenter (the author) ran all subjects for whom there was to be a female assistant.

The task was a variation of that used by Tessler & Schwartz. Male subjects were asked to listen to a series of dialogues and following each dialogue to first rate it for neuroticism and then taperecord a brief explanation of the basis of their ratings. After each explanation they were given false feedback indicating that their ratings were discrepant from those supposedly made by clinical psychologists. Thus, all subjects were in a failure situation. The major dependent variable was help seeking indexed in two ways: (1)the latency of the request (the number of dialogues rated prior to seeking help) and (2)whether or not a help request was ever made. Self-ratings of embarrassment and related moods were secondary dependent measures.

One hundred and four males recruited through newspaper advertising were paid $2 for participation. Data were analyzed for 99 of these subjects. Their age ranged from 15 to 29 with mean 20.31 and mode 19. Almost all (93%) were high school or college students.

Prior to entry into the experiment subjects completed and returned by mail a modified version of Sherwood's (1962) self concept measure and a scale measuring sex role ideology. Since no appropriate scale of sex role ideology was available, one was developed using a large pool of items from other scales. This item pool was administered, along with the Crowne-Marlowe social desirability scale (1964), to 33 undergraduate males at the University of Wisconsin. Items for the sex role scale were selected from the pool based on the following criteria: (1)failure to correlate with social desirability, (2)significant correlation with the total scale and significant differences between groups split in thirds by total scale score with the three groups showing a linear trend (Likert, 1932), and (3)mean, standard deviation, and range such that a wide distribution of responses across the scale was assured. The resultant seven items were embedded in a 32-item attitude scale to disguise the study's focus on sex role. Responses to each item ranged from agree strongly to disagree strongly and were scored from -2 to +2, with +2 assigned in the feminist (F) direction. The items are listed below and their direction indicated by F or T.

> If a man and woman have careers and are offered jobs that would advance them in different cities, the husband should take the new job and the wife should follow him. (T)

Inequality in the property of men and women is grossly unfair. (F)
The joint earnings of a husband and wife should be under the control of both the husband and the wife. (F)
It goes against nature to have a woman as foreman or boss. (T)
Although women play a part in many important jobs today, woman's proper place is still in the home. (T)
A husband has the right to expect his wife to bear him children. (T)
Equal responsibility by man and woman for housekeeping is only right. (F)

Scores on both scales were dichotomized at approximately the median. Subjects were scheduled by telephone to participate and were assigned to experimental condition to block on these personality types with experimenters "blind" to the types.

Subjects were run in individual sessions. After the subject was seated, the experimenter played the tape recorded instructions which explained that the study was designed to test techniques for training people to identify instances of neurotic interaction. It was further explained that he would listen to a series of dialogues between a pair of graduate students and rate each for neuroticism on a scale from 0 to 8. The subject was instructed to then give a 30 second explanation of why he made the rating. The experimenter indicated that the explanation would be tape recorded from an adjacent room.

The subject was prohibited from discussing the task with the experimenter but an "assistant" who was somewhere in the building and who could be contacted by walkie talkie was made available to help him. The assistant was a fictitious person who supposedly had been a subject, had done well on the task, and had received

further training. To increase motivation, the instructions ended with the mention of a job possibility as an assistant for subjects who performed well. The task and cover story are essentially the same as those used by Tessler & Schwartz.

The sex of the assistant, who was called either Alan or Ellen, was manipulated in the taped instructions. The sex of the experimenter was always the same as the sex of the assistant. The experimenters attempted to perform their roles as similarly as possible so that differences could be attributed to sex of assistant rather than to sex of experimenter or idiosyncratic differences between experimenters; however, the possibility of a confound does exist.

When the tape recorded instructions ended the experimenter answered questions and explained the use of equipment. She (he) then went into the next room, demonstrated that she (he) could communicate with the subject over the intercom and then continued over the intercom with the audience manipulation:

> Oh, by the way, there's a group of students touring the psychology department today from Rockford College (or High School depending on the subject's age). You wouldn't mind if some of them listened to the study, would you?

In No Future Interaction condition, the experimenter commented:

> They have to be at the primate center in half an hour so they'll only be able to stay part of the time, and won't have a chance to discuss the task with you when you've finished.

In Future Interaction condition, the experimenter said:

> They have nothing scheduled till an hour and a half from now when they're supposed to be at the primate center, so unless you have any strong objections, they'll be able to discuss the task with you when you've finished.

In both conditions subjects were asked, "That's all right with you, isn't it? (pause) One second, I'll tell them." Only one subject refused this request. After a brief pause, a tape recording was played to simulate an audience. The door opened and closed, chairs scraped, and a male and female talked briefly with the experimenter.

Then the experimenter returned to the subject's room and manipulated the sex role appropriateness of the task:

Female (Male) Task

> I thought you might be interested in some of the things we've learned so far in working with this task. First of all, women (men) tend to do much better on the task than men (women) do.
>
> Also in studying what personality characteristics are related to the task, we've found that success is highly correlated with the femininity (masculinity) score on the MMPI--that's the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. It seems that there are a number of traits females (males) tend to have which are related to this task--for example, being empathic, intuitive, and socially skillful (objective, practical, and logical).
>
> Although we've checked out many other variables, we haven't found any others which predicted success on the task.

The experimenter then played a sample explanation which was ostensibly made by the assistant when the assistant had served as a subject. It was justified as a means of providing the subject with a better idea of the task. Actually, it was incldued to reinforce the sex of helper manipulation and to evidence the assistant's competence. The subject was then asked to complete Reaction Form 1 which included a number of manipulation checks. Finally, the experimenter reviewed the procedure and reminded the subject that he could seek help. After asking for further procedural questions, the experimenter returned to the adjoining room allowing the subject to begin the task.

The study continued until the subject requested assistance or completed all eight dialogues. Following each rating and explanation, the experimenter informed the subject that the clinical psychologists' rating was 2 or 3 points discrepant from the subject's rating. The experimenter used standard phrases to give this feedback.

After giving feedback on the rating of the first dialogue, the experimenter reinstated the audience manipulation: "Could you speak up a bit, the students are having a little difficulty hearing you," and in the Future Interaction condition continued, "and they want to discuss the explanations with you later."

The subject completed a reaction form for each dialogue after receiving feedback on his rating of that dialogue. This form included a scale of felt embarrassment consisting of four adjective pairs (e.g., at ease--self-conscious) each rated on a 9 point scale (Modigliani, 1971) and three questions asking the subject to rate his past accuracy and predict his future accuracy on a 9 point scale.

After the eighth dialogue or a subject's request for help, the experimenter returned to the subject's room and questioned the subject to check on the manipulations. The subject was then debriefed and asked not to discuss the study with others. Time was spent making certain that subjects understood that the feedback they got was unrelated to their performance and that they didn't feel badly about the procedures.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation checks ascertained that all manipulations were successful. The false feedback caused subjects to feel incompetent --77% of the subjects rated themselves at or below the midpoint

in competence. In addition, the assistant was seen as an appropriate source of help. All but two subjects rated the assistant at or above the midpoint in competence; and 81% of the subjects rated the assistant at or above the midpoint in helpfulness.

All but two subjects indicated recall of which sex performed better on the task. An unweighted means analysis of variance of subjects' ratings of masculinity-femininity in relation to success on the task produced a significant main effect for sex of task ($F=13.68$, d.f.-1,67, $p<.001$) [2] and no other significant effects. The mean for subjects told that males performed better was 4.68, while those told females performed better had a mean of 3.71, with the scale ranging from 0 signifying femininity to 8 signifying masculinity. The specific attributes mentioned in the male-female task manipulation were also rated, and analyses of variance on these ratings were computed. For four of the six traits, the main effects for sex of task were significant, with the means in the expected direction. For the other two traits, there were no significant effects.

An analysis of variance of subjects responses to "Do you expect to meet the students?" indicated a significant main effect for future interaction ($F=203.81$, $p<.001$) and no other significant effects.

An analysis of variance of the number of dialogues rated prior

[2]Unless otherwise specified, all analyses are unweighted means analyses for a 2^2 factorial design with d.f.=1,67.

to requesting help, with a rating of nine assigned to subjects who did not request help indicated no significant effects. However, the analysis of variance of the second helping index--requesting help scored as 1 and not requesting help as 0 with an arcsin transformation performed on the scores--indicated partial support for hypothesized relationships.

There was a significant interaction between sex of task, future interaction, and self-esteem ($F=4.14$, $p<.05$). High esteem subjects sought help less frequently on the male task when future interaction was anticipated. The results of comparisons among means using the least significant difference (LSD)[3] test (Kirk, 1968, 87) are shown in Table 1. In addition, there was a trend

Table 1

Mean proportion of help requests (arcsin transformed data)

Sex of Task x Future Interaction x Self-esteem

	Low Self-esteem				High Self-esteem			
	Male Task		Female Task		Male Task		Female Task	
No Future Interaction	.79b		1.11b		.95b		.92b	
	(54%)	(13)	(69%)	(13)	(62%)	(13)	(58%)	(12)
Future Interaction	.92b		.79ab		.39a		1.18b	
	(58%)	(12)	(50%)	(12)	(25%)	(12)	(75%)	(12)

Note.--Means with subscripts in common do not differ significantly at $p<.1$ ($LSD_{12}=.415$, $LSD_{12,13}=.4$, $LSD_{13}=.39$). For $p<.05$, $LSD_{12}=.535$, $LSD_{12,13}=.52$, $LSD_{13}=.51$. Per cents in parentheses represent the actual per cent of subjects who requested help. The other number in parentheses represents the cell size.

[3]The LSD test which is used for all comparisons is analogous to performing multiple t-tests. The figure LSD which is presented is the smallest difference which is significant at the probability level given.

toward an interaction of sex of task x self-esteem x sex role ideology ($F=3.33$, $p<.1$). For high esteem traditional subjects, there was less help seeking on the male task and more help seeking on the female task. Feminists did not differ in help seeking according to sex of task. Data for traditional subjects parallels the centrality x esteem interaction found by Tessler & Schwartz. Means are presented in Table 2. It was expected that traditional

Table 2

Mean proportion of help requests (arcsin transformed data)

Sex of Task x Self-esteem x Sex Role Ideology

	Low Self-esteem		High Self-esteem	
	Male Task	Female Task	Male Task	Female Task
Traditional	1.05bc (69%) (13)	.85abc (54%) (13)	.52a (33%) (12)	1.18c (75%) (12)
Feminist	.65ab (42%) (12)	1.05bc (67%) (12)	.82abc (54%) (13)	.92abc (58%) (12)

Note.--Means with subscripts in common do not differ significantly at $p<.1$ ($LSD_{12}=.425$, $LSD_{12,13}=.4$, $LSD_{13}=.39$). $LSD_{12}=.535$, $LSD_{12,13}=.52$, $LSD_{13}=.51$ for $p<.05$. Per cents in parentheses represent the actual per cent of subjects who requested help. The other number in parentheses represents the cell sizes.

males would be less likely to seek help when sex of assistant was inappropriate to sex of task, especially on a male task with a female assistant. However, this hypothesis was not confirmed.

Thus, at least for high self-esteem males, help seeking is inhibited on male tasks. This is one among many instances where men are limited by sex stereotyped training. In educational settings requests for tutoring, counseling and other services are probably

affected by this. By deemphasizing sex appropriate behavior and decreasing the pressure on men to be independent, we can free them to seek help when it is needed. This is important generally to allow better utilization of services, and for individuals to allow for growth.

References

Crowne, D. & Marlowe, D., The Approval Motive, New York: Wiley, 1964.

Greenberg, M.S., A preliminary statement on a theory of indebtedness in M.S. Greenberg (Chm.), Justice in Social Exchange, Symposium presented at the Western Psychological Association, San Diego, 1968.

Hartup, W.W., Dependence and independence, in National Society for the Study of Education Sixty-second Yearbook, Child Psychology, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963, 333-363.

Kirk, R.E., Experimental Design: Procedures for the Behavioral Sciences, Belmont, California: Brooks/Cole, 1968.

Kohlberg, L., A cognitive-developmental analysis of children's sex-role concepts and attitudes in E.E. Maccoby (Ed.), The Development of Sex Differences, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1966, 82-172.

Likert, R., A technique for the measurement of attitudes, Archives of Psychology, 1932, No.140.

Modigliani, A., Embarrassment, facework, and eye contact: testing a theory of embarrassment, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1971, 17, 15-24.

Sattler, J.M., A theoretical,developmental, and clinical investigation of embarrassment, Genetic Psychology Monographs, 1965, 71, 19-59.

Sherwood, J.J., Self-identity and self-actualization: a theory and research, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1962.

Tessler, R.C. & Schwartz, S.H., Help-seeking, self-esteem, and achievement motivation: an attributional analysis, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, in press.